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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Miller, Buerkle Statement on VA Sexual Assault Report

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report entitled, “VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Prevent Sexual Assaults and Other Safety Incidents.” In the report, requested by Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and Rep. Bob Filner, Ranking Member of the Committee, GAO found that between 2007-2010, 284 sexual assaults occurred at VA residential programs and were reported to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) police. However, the majority of these incidents were not reported to VA leadership or the VA Inspector General, as required by federal law. Among the incidents examined there were 67 incidents of alleged rape, 185 incidents of alleged inappropriate touching, 8 incidents of alleged forceful medical examinations, 13 incidents of alleged forced or inappropriate oral sex, and 11 other alleged sexual assaults. All of these incidents occurred at inpatient VA facilities for mental health treatment and domiciliary programs. The full report can be found [here](#).

“When I first read this report, I was aghast. It reminded me of a 1950s prison system—lawlessness, lack of security and reporting, and outright disregard for human dignity. Upon review of the seriousness of the alleged incidents and the potential pervasive nature of this behavior within VA residential programs, not only were we repulsed and sickened by the findings, but the Committee was compelled to take immediate action,” stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. “We have already introduced legislation (H.R. 2074) to ensure safer and more secure environments for veterans and VA employees. We have also scheduled a hearing on June 13 to delve further into the findings reported by GAO. Most disturbing is a question that has yet been answered, how widespread is this problem? I am committed to finding the answer to that question and ensuring that our veterans and VA employees are safe from offensive sexual attacks.”

“The GAO report unveils a fundamental weakness in the system. The VA failed to protect patients and staff because it did not take the system-wide allegations seriously enough to actually address them. The VA waited on Congress to act, to the detriment of hundreds of patients and staff who should have been able to depend on the VA to keep them safe.” stated Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health. “As a registered nurse and domestic violence counselor, I have seen firsthand the pervasive and damaging effects of sexual violence on its survivors. The allegations are disturbing for many reasons, foremost because they represent a betrayal of trust by a system that was designed to treat our veterans at their most vulnerable. VA’s mission is to care and heal our veterans, and the report findings are an affront to that mandate. As Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health, I am determined to hold those responsible accountable and ensure victims are given recourse so that justice is served.”

A hearing on this report is scheduled for June 13 at 4:00 P.M.

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